

The Minor Prophets #22

Obadiah

by: Ronald L. Dart

The Old Testament book of Obadiah is the shortest of all the Minor Prophets and strangely it doesn't really seem to say a lot to modern man and I can understand why people reading the Bible kind of brush by it. But as I have said before, trying to understand the biblical prophets solely in terms of events in the far distance future or solely in terms of events in the far distance past, it's kind of pointless. I got the clue from something Isaiah said long ago it was a challenge to idol worshipers.

Isaiah Chapter 41 Verse 21: **Present your case, saith the LORD; set forth your arguments, says Jacob's King. Bring in your idols tell us what is going to happen.** This is the real test God says, if your idol are all that great tell us what is going to happen. Then he says this, **tell us what the former things were so we may consider them and know their final outcome or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what the future holds so we may know that you are Gods.**

Now it's disappointing that so few people really study the history presented in the Old Testament because if we don't understand what happened before, we have no hope of understanding what the Bible says about our own future. The book of Obadiah just might be a case in point, it's only one Chapter and it's all about a nation called Edom. Now who on earth are they and where are they and why do they matter so much. Well Edom is one of those nations in ancient times that surrounded Israel, they were in Tyre in the north of Lebanon, Syria and Damascus in the northeast across Jordan from the north to south there was Amon, Moab and Edom, south along the coast Gaza. Israel at one time or another was at war with all of these people they you're next door neighbors and I guess it just happens you know you're going to fight from time to time. When they were at peace it was an uneasy peace much as it is right now.

A little history of Israel and their brothers the Arab people:

History does indeed repeat itself because human nature never changes, men and nations keep making the same mistakes and they keep fighting about the same stupid things over and over again. Most of the Old Testament prophets address these people the neighbors of Israel and they speak to what's going to happen too them in days to come. What makes this story so sad many of these folks were kin folks they were in ancient time's brothers. Moab and Amon for example were the sons of Lot a near kinsman of Abraham, his nephew I

believe and their history goes back a long, long way. Ishmael the father of the Arab people was a brother to Jacob whose name was changed to Israel who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. So here you have the Israelites on the one hand and the Arab's on the other hand, brothers going way back and yet at war it seems forever. And Edom was the nation composed of the sons of Esau, Jacob's own brother. The animosity between Jacob Israel and Esau goes back further than most of these do.

In fact you'll find this story back in the 25th Chapter of the book of Genesis. Isaac had married his wife Rebekah and she had not had any children and so he asked God, and Rebekah conceived and the children struggled together within her. It turns out she was carrying twins so she went to inquire of the LORD about what was going on inside and the LORD said to her. Two nations are in your womb, two manners of people shall be separated from you, the one people shall be stronger than the other and the elder shall serve the younger. Now when you're thinking about twins you might think elder, younger, but even though it's just a matter of minutes it's very important from the standpoint of who's going to be the first born. When her day came to deliver there were twins, the first came out red all over like a hairy garment they called his name Esau, I think that means red, after that his brother came out and his hand took hold of Esau's heel and his name was called Jacob. Isaac, poor ole Isaac, was 16 years old when these boys were born. They grew up and Esau was a cunning hunter a man of the field but Jacob was a smooth man and he lived in tents he was an indoor guy. Now Isaac he loved Esau, he was special he was the first born. Esau was a hunter and Isaac just loved his venison, but Jacob was his mother's boy and Rebekah loved Jacob. Now you're going back all the way to this woman's womb and these two men were fighting with one another then and they grow up in this conflict. It turns out that Jacob's a pretty good cook and he was cooking one day when Esau came in from the field, he hadn't eaten in a long time and he was faint with hunger. He said to Jacob feed me I pray with that same red soup you're making for I am faint, (now his name is called Edom), and Jacob said sell me this day your birthright. Esau thinks and says look I'm at the point to die what point is this birthright to me and Jacob said swear to me this day and he swore to him and he sold his birthright to Jacob. So Jacob gave Esau bread and lentils soup and he did eat and drink and rose up and went his way. The scripture concludes this little story by this saying, thus Esau despised his birthright. Now why should that even be important? Well in ancient times by custom nearly everything that belonged to a man went to his first born son and the second, third or fourth, well they had to kind of fend for themselves. But Esau on this occasion sold it off and I don't think his father even knew that he had done it. Time passed and Esau decided to get some wife's and so he took two wives Judith the daughter of a Hittite and Bashemath the daughter of another Hittite and they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.

The story continues in Genesis 27 And it came to pass **when Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so he couldn't see** any longer cataract probably, **he called Esau his eldest son and said, my son: and he said to him I'm here, he said look I'm old, I know not the day of my death** I know it's coming but I don't know when it will be: **Now look get your weapons, and your bow and go out and take me some venison;** come back and make me

that savory meat that I love, and bring it to me so that my soul may bless you before I die. He wanted to actually have a special meal and as a part of the ceremony to pass on the birth right to Esau and probably not knowing that Esau had sold his birthright because it wasn't important to him. **Well Rebekah heard all this story and Esau took off to hunt for venison to bring it in, and Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, hey look, I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, said get me some venison and make me savory meat that I may eat it and bless you before the LORD before my death. Now therefore, my son, listen to my voice do what I'm going to tell you to do. Get out to the flock, and fetch me from there two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savory meat for your father, that which he loves. I know the recipe. And you shall take it to your father, that he may eat, and that he may bless you before his death.**

Well Jacob was no fool and said to his mother hey Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I'm a smooth man: My father will feel of me, and I will seem to him as a deceiver; and I will bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. And his mother said to him, let your curse be on me my son just do as I said and get the goats. And he went, and fetched them, and brought them to his mother: and she made the savory meat like his father really loved it. And she took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob. And she took the skins of the goats and put them on the back of his hands, and some on the smooth of his neck in the back. And she gave this meat which she had prepared into the hand of her son Jacob.

All right he's imitating, impersonating Esau, and he came unto his father and he said, my father, and he said here am I, who are you my son? And Jacob said I'm Esau your firstborn; I have done what you wanted me to do, get up I pray and eat of my venison, that your soul may bless me. And Isaac said to his son, how is it you found it so fast, my son? That a logical question. And he said, because the LORD your God brought it to me. He's lying through his teeth. And Isaac said come near, I pray so that I may feel you my son, whether you really are Esau and so Jacob went near to Isaac and he felt him and he said, the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he did not spot him because his hands were hairy as his brother Esau's, so he blessed him. And he passed down having eaten all this the blessing of the first born on Jacob.

While it's unfortunate that Jacob lied to him, never the less Esau had sold it to him and what was happening happened. Now what does that have to do with the prophecy of Obadiah?

This story is full of intrigue and high drama and I really marvel that no one ever has made a movie of it. Because, **just as soon as Isaac get through blessing Jacob and he'd just gone out the door,** it almost hit him in the back **and Esau came in the other door just back from hunting, he'd made the savory meat, he brought to his father and said, will my father rise and eat of his sons venison that your soul may bless me, and Isaac his father said, who are you?**

And he said, I'm your firstborn Esau and poor Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, who? Where is he that has taken venison and brought it to me and I have eaten of it before you got here, and I have blessed him? Yes, he will be blessed. And when Esau heard these words, he cried with a bitter cry, and said to his father. Bless me also my father. And he said, your brother came with subtlety and has taken away your blessing. Is he not rightly named Jacob said Esau, for he has supplanted me these two times and he took away my birthright, now he has taken away my blessing. Ah come on, he sold his birthright. And he said, have you reserved a blessing for me father.

And Isaac his father said I have made him your Lord and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: what am I going to do for you? And Esau cried and said to his father, you just got one blessing, bless me also my father? And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. And Isaac his father said to him, Behold, your dwelling shall be from the fatness of the earth and of the dew of heaven from above and by your sword you will live, you will serve your brother; and it shall come to pass when you shall have the dominion, that you shall break his yoke from off thy neck.

The result of all this was Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing his father had blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, the days of mourning for my father are at hand; **then I'm going to slay my brother Jacob. Well momma found out about this and she sent and called Jacob in and said, hey look we're going to have to get you out of here, Esau comfort himself purposing to kill you. Now leave, hear my voice and go to Laban my brother in Haran, and wait with him a few days until your brothers fury is turned away.**

Now this is one of the great stories of the Bible of how Jacob left, took himself two wives' ended up having twelve children, we know them as the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob and Esau would later make an uneasy peace but the amenity smoldered forever under the surface, thus their children were at war periodically down through the ages.

One wonders how much those ancient animosity poisoned the air in the Middle East to this day and you wonder don't people ever forget the answer is apparently not. They pass on their bitterness down through to their children and to their children's, children's, generation after generation. If you want to see a vision of how it works just take a look at the Palestinians today who pass on generation after generation their hatred for the Israelis and the Jews and it doesn't look like it's ever going to go away.

Israel and Judah in particular were in a long decline throughout their history and the whole nation unraveled at the hand first of the Assyrians and finally of Babylon. It's fascinating that the nations around Israel their kinsman were never able to prevail in their repeated wars. There was the Moab, Amon, Edom, Gaza none of them able to win for the long run, any victory they had was short lived. They just could not defeat Israel and it took the Mesopotamia empires to finally take Israel down. How that may play out in our future

that's not clear, if history is any indicator it's just not going to happen. Someone further away with the connivance of the Israel's kin, perhaps the Palestinian's or Jordan may bring Jerusalem down again. It was Rome that did it in the years following Jesus and the Olivet Prophecy and so it would be a mistake to focus too closely on eastern powers like Iran as tempting as that may be. Its best we keep an open mind, all history tells us is, that the immediate neighbors of Israel will not be able to bring her down. History and prophecy seems to say that those neighbors will connive with someone else to do the deed.

Here is what the prophets tell us about that. Those neighbors will not escape either, you'll find this in Daniel's prophecy, you'll find it Isaiah, you'll find it in Jeremiah, in a lesser degree in Ezekiel but all through this segment you'll find times whenever the prophets stop to convict and condemned those nations that destroyed Israel and those nations that participated in the destruction of Israel.

The prophet Obadiah comes on the scene right at the time of the fall of Jerusalem, when the Babylonian's came in and took everyone captive. They release Jeremiah from prison about this time, and Jeremiah stayed for awhile but ended up going down into Egypt with the Jews that escaped down there. Obadiah comes on the scene and announces his visions.

The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; we've heard a rumor from the LORD and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, arise you and rise up against her in battle. Behold, I have made you small among the heathen: you are greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you so you that dwell in the clefts of the rock whose habitation is high; that says in his heart nobody is going to bring me down to the ground?

These references here to people who dwell in the clefts of the rock and whose habitation is high, most commentators seem to think is a reference to the ancient city of Petra which is a rock as it were in a pretty severely constrained area, where a person could hide up there and fight off whole armies with a small body of men. Edom really felt very secure down there, they were small and they were despised by most people but they still managed to survive.

Verse 4: **Though you exalt yourself as the eagle and though you set your nest among the stars from there I'm going to bring you down saith the LORD. If thieves came to you and if robbers came by night, (Oh how are you cut off!)** apparently it's going to be really bad.

Would they have stolen till they had enough? If the grape gatherers came to you, wouldn't they have left you some grapes on the vine?

The implication is Edom is going to be absolutely stripped.

How are the things of Esau searched out! And how are his hidden things sought up!

In other words the people who come in there are going to take everything even the stuff they hidden.

All the men of your confederacy have brought you even to the border: the men that were at peace with you have deceived you and prevailed against you; the people who sat at your table and ate your bread have laid a wound under you: there is no understanding in him.

Now in Obadiah's day they had made a confederacy, Edom had, with the Babylonians and they had cooperated with them, they had been at peace with the Babylonians and the Babylonians deceived them and took them along with everybody else.

God begins to call in the things that have been done and he says Verse 8: **Shall I not in that day, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau? And your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.**

Now other prophecy leads me to think that was not accomplished when the Babylonian's came in or even shortly thereafter how it happened or where it went from there is hard to say but the reason why this is going to happen he says.

For your violence against your brother Jacob shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever. In the day that you stood on the other side in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces and foreigners entered into his gates and cast lots upon Jerusalem even you were one of them.

They had made a complete alliance with Babylon and whenever some of the people tried to escape and ran for it by night Edom apparently was the one that helped the Babylonian cut them off and God said I'm not going to forget that.

You know it's really something to think about and I wonder does Esau still exist or were they completely cut off or could they be completely gone. If the nations around Israel right now follow the same pattern that Esau followed of becoming confederate with whoever it is that finally begin to come down on Judah again they'll pay for it big time.

In Verse 12: **You should not have looked on the day of your brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress.**

Oh the lessons come home on this.

You should not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; you should not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity or have laid your hands on their substance in the day of their calamity. You bunch of thieves. Neither should you have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; and you shouldn't have delivered up those of his who did remain in the day of distress.

I don't know for sure who he's talking about here but I do know that Zedekiah, King Zedekiah and his men fled by night and tried to get away when the walls of Jerusalem were being broken down they ran for it. But the Babylonian caught them and they killed every one of Zedekiah son's right in front of his face them put his eyes out and slapped him in chains and put him in prison for the rest of his blind life.

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as you have done, it shall be done to you: your reward shall return upon your own head.

And I read this I look at the Middle East and I see what people are doing and I'm saying to myself, Oh people don't do these things it's all going to come home to roost.

For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had never had been. But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess all their possessions. And the house of Jacob shall be like a fire, and the house of Joseph like a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD has spoken it.

Has it already happened or is it something that's coming yet again. When I read through this I'm starting at the end of the book of Obadiah to get little hints of the day of the Lord the last day the end of man and man's rule.

He goes on to say. **And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines:** So the south like Egypt possessing the mount of Esau.

And they of the plains possessing the land of the Palestinian and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.

In other words Israel gets it all back.

And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites, all the way to Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem shall possess the

cities of the south. And saviors shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.

Is Esau still there, well if they are apparently they won't be there very much longer. All of this begins to sound more and more like the future far distant from Obadiah and less like the fate of Esau in his own days.

Don't make the mistake of drawing scenarios about the last days, your scenario can cause you to look in the wrong direction at the wrong time. I fear yet another holocaust to come upon Jerusalem now only on the Jews but on all their neighbors as well and this time could easily be the last.

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